

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**Narrative Lectionary 2.23 – Rejection in Nazareth, Sending of Disciples
Mark 6:1-13 [14-29]**

**9 February 2020
Salem, Bridgeport**

“How to Receive a Miracle”

Jesus’s ministry could not have been going better!
He had been preaching and teaching and healing throughout Galilee
and people were coming from all around the country,
many traveling as many as 60 miles on foot
just to get the chance to hear him and have their lives changed for the better.

Just last week his disciples had witnessed an astounding miracle.
They had been out on the sea in a boat and a storm had come up
and the storm was so severe that these hardy fishermen were afraid for their lives.
As they scurried around, lowering the sails, shifting the ballast,
and trying feverishly to keep the ship upright, Jesus was in the stern, sound asleep.
When Peter had realized that, he had shaken Jesus awake,
and Jesus, exhausted, and now annoyed at being awakened,
had yelled at him for his lack of faith.

Then he had yelled for the storm to cease. And it had! IMMEDIATELY!
One minute the boat was rocking precariously, the rain was pelting down,
and you couldn’t see from one side of the ship to the other,
and then the next, the boat was motionless, the storm clouds had blown away,
and the sun was blazing brightly in a clear blue sky.
It has been an amazing thing to see – amazing and a bit scary, if truth be told.

And the healings this week?!
In with the small, ordinary, everyday kinds of healings, there were some really awesome ones.
There had been this crazy giant of a man who ran around naked amongst the tombs,
howling and beating himself with stones.
People had tried to restrain him with chains,
but his strength seemed superhuman and he kept breaking free.
When Jesus saw him, he commanded demons to come out of him & then sent them into a herd of swine
which promptly rushed headlong over a cliff.
The man was overjoyed to be set free,
but the rest of the people were so freaked out they had asked Jesus to leave.

Then one of the rulers of the synagogue had come running to Jesus,
desperate as his daughter was dying.
And while Jesus was making his way through the crowd to heal the little girl,
he had stopped suddenly in his tracks and asked who had touched him!
As it turned out it has been a woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years –
who had broken all ritual cleanliness laws and touched the hem of his robe –
and she had been immediately and completely healed.
The exchange should only take in a few minutes,
but by the time he reached the little girl she had died.
And he had raised her from the dead!

This Jesus with something else entirely. There was nothing that he could not do!

Until they found themselves in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth.

And there, except for a few minor healings, it seemed Jesus' power had deserted him.

First of all, not everyone came up for healing.

And then some people came and Jesus laid hands on them, but for most of them nothing happened.

The disciples were perplexed and a bit fearful,

but Jesus explained that it wasn't his fault – it was due to a lack of faith –
and that lack of faith was because he was in his hometown.

There was no use staying, so Jesus and the disciples made plans to leave the next morning.

Now it doesn't say this in scripture

but what I imagine is that that night over dinner Jesus explained.

I imagine he told his disciples that God's love and power is always available here and now.

If what your heart desires is healing, and you believe that God not only can but will heal you,
and you believe it so strongly that you –

begin to feel that it has already happened, then it actually has.

That's what had happened for the hundreds of people Jesus had healed –

the gift of healing graciously offered, the gift of healing gratefully received, through faith.

But there were things that got in the way of faith –

things that made it impossible for that healing that was being offered to be received.

What got in the way were three things: -

people's perception of God, their perception of others, and their perceptions of themselves.

First of all, what gets in our way is our perception of God.

When a people traveled for 60 miles to see this miracle worker Jesus, that's what they saw –
a phenomenal man who could perform amazing, awesome miracles.

That's what they had heard about him, that's what they knew about him,
that's what they expected from him.

And that's what they got.

But the people in Jesus' hometown? They couldn't see a phenomenal miracle worker.

All they could see was a guy named Jesus, a guy they'd grown up with, an ordinary human being,
someone that was certainly no better than they were.

They'd known him for 30 years & he'd worked no miracles in their lives in all that time
so how could he possibly do so now?

Those that saw Jesus as a miracle worker got their miracles;
those that saw Jesus as an ordinary guy didn't.

What is our perception of God?

For those of us who have grown up in the faith, we've known Jesus all of our lives,
just like the people of Nazareth.

If when we look back on our lives God is simply in the background,
& we don't see any evidence of God working miracles,
then it's going to be hard to expect any miracles in the future.

But if when we look back over our lives
we see God moving out of the background into the foreground,
speaking to us, healing us, working some change in our lives,
then it will be easier for us to expect miracles in the future.

If we believe God can work a miracle in our lives, then God can;
if we don't believe, then God can't.

The first thing that gets in the way of the faith that allows us to receive miracles is our perception of God.

The second is our perception of other people.

As human beings we categorize and judge and label.

The people who came to see Jesus from miles around saw him as a miracle worker; the people from Nazareth saw him as an ordinary guy who was getting too big for his britches.

Every single person we know is comprised of strengths and weaknesses, gifts and limitations, positive traits and not so positive ones.

So we can look at a person and either see the good, the positive, the potential or we can see the bad, the negative, the limiting.

A few weeks ago my husband received a distinguished alumni award from our high school.

As I listened to the person introducing him, and the lengthy list of outstanding accomplishments, I was surprised by what an incredible person they were describing.

And I found myself caught up short because when I look at him I don't usually see the man who has raised millions of dollars for organizations and who once won the highest award given by Yale University but rather the guy who makes a mess of the kitchen every time he cooks and who asked me earlier that week how to turn off the light on the dishwasher that we've had for 20 years!

Think about someone in your life who drives you nuts, or who you dislike, or who you would like out of your life, and realize that you are limiting yourself by seeing only one side of that person.

The trouble with that is that when you limit your perception of another person to something negative, you limit yourself.

Every single person we know is in our lives because God has brought them to us to help us grow.

If we open ourselves to the way God wants to act in them and through them, then God can work through them to do something beautiful in our lives.

And not only will we be helping ourselves but we will be helping them, because every negative thought we have,

every hurtful word we speak, every destruction thing we do, limits them from being who God has called them to be.

And finally what limits our faith and keeps us
from being healed, from experiencing miracles, from receiving our heart's desires –
is our perception of ourselves.

If we don't think we're worthy of God's love,
then it will be hard for us to experience God's love.

If we see ourselves as being limited, and we will continue to be limited
despite the offer of God's healing grace.

If I see myself as a person with migraines, I will always be a person with migraines.

If I see myself as someone who suffers from anxiety, I will continue to suffer from anxiety.

If I believe I will always be overweight, I'll always be overweight.

If I believe I will never have enough money, I will never have enough money.

If I see myself as someone who can only worship in a certain way,

I will continue to be a person who can only worship in a certain way.

I don't know about you but I could use some miracles in my life.

Miracles are there waiting for me. Miracles are there waiting for you.

But to access them we need faith.

And faith comes when we let go

of our limiting perceptions of God, of other people and of ourselves.

Do you need a miracle? Do you want one? Is it not showing up?

Then there may be some things that are getting in the way of your faith.

And if that's the situation,

then it may be time to change your perceptions of God, of others, and of yourself.

Are you looking for transformation? For healing? For a miracle?

First, know that God has the power to give it to you!

Know that God loves you enough to give it!

Second, realize that that miracle could come through anybody in your life –
probably through someone you don't want it to come through!

So let go of negative thoughts and critical judgments and hurtful blame

and open yourself to those very people from whom you've closed yourself off.

And finally, start envisioning yourself as already having received that miracle,

being who you want to be, having what you want to have. doing what you want to do.

Jesus is, as the song says, a “way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness.

God wants nothing more than to give you the deepest desire of your heart.

Ask, and you will receive! Seek and you will find!

Knock and the door of the kingdom will be opened to you!

People of Nazareth, open your eyes and see anew the Miracle Worker who stands among you.

Amen